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ABSTRACT

An Hispanic practitioner discusses the identification of both the non-English speaking and English speaking culturally different gifted child. Definitions are offered for nondiscriminatory assessment and giftedness. Four case studies illustrate the methods used to identify two English speaking and two nonEnglish speaking gifted Hispanic children. Advantages and disadvantages of test translations, culture specific tests, culture fair tests, nonverbal measures of intelligence, and pluralistic norms as employed by the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA) are touched upon. Also provided are suggestions for improving existing identification methods. Practitioners are encouraged to take social, cultural, and linguistic factors into consideration in their evaluation of culturally different children. (Author/SB)

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TOPICAL CONFERENCE ON THE EXCEPTIONAL BILINGUAL CHILD

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Title of presentation: THE NONDISCRIMINATORY ASSESSMENT OF THE GIFTED BILINGUAL CHILD

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BACKGROUND

Buenos Dias. My name is Ralph Rivera. I am employed as an educational diagnostician by the Albuquerque Public Schools, Albuquerque, New Mexico. A.P.S. has a student population of 80,000 pupils. Approximately 12,000 students are provided with some kind of special education educational or support services, varying from itinerant to full-time programs. I am a native Nuevo Mexicano. I am proud of my heritage. I am an American. I am a Hispanic. These are my roots.

INTRODUCTION

My topic today is the nonbiased assessment of bilingual gifted children. My views are that of a practitioner. My only expertise is based on my experience and limited powers of observation. This is my fourth year as an educational diagnostician, and I have had three years experience as a teacher in special education. I have worked with all exceptionalities and ages of children. I hold no particular fascination with the area of gifted. However, I do feel that my experience in this field may aid others in the identification of culturally different gifted children. (Sato, 1974; Frasier, 1979; Chin, 1979.) I have acquainted myself with the literature pertaining to this topic and have compiled a selected bibliography on the research for those that are interested. The problem of identifying the culturally

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different gifted children is that they are not easily recognizable by traditional methods. Their talents remained unnurtured which is a great waste of our country's greatest natural resource ... its future leaders and innovators (Barron and Chambers, 1978; Smilansky and Nevo, 1975). What I intend to do is to inform you about how one practitioner (myself) goes about trying to identify both the non-English speaking and the English speaking culturally different gifted children. Four case studies will be used to illustrate the methods employed. During the course of the presentation I may drift off the topic briefly to introduce to you my biases on some of the issues raised pertaining to the nondiscriminatory assessment of children.

NONDISCRIMINATORY ASSESSMENT DEFINED

In order to insure the nondiscriminatory assessment of any child, the examiner must first ascertain whether a child has any sensory or motor deficits which may impair his test-taking performance. Does the child have any physical impairments or poor visual and hearing acuity? Usually, this information is submitted with the referral for testing. Another factor that has to be investigated prior to conducting an evaluation is to make sure the child has had the same opportunity to learn the materials on the test, the same motivation to perform, and the same test-taking experience as those children who were used in the standardization. The examiner can only do this indirectly by taking a child's social-cultural background into consideration. The only instrument that attempts to do this is the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA) developed by Jane Mercer and published by Psychological Corporation. Finally, does the child understand and speak the same language that is contained in the test material? To some, this may appear to be obviously discernable. Incongruous as it may seem, many children may readily communicate in English but speak English as a second language or may speak substandard English. By substandard, I mean

different than the English language skills required in a test-taking siutation. An instrument such as the Home Bilingual Usage Estimate can be helpful in making such a determination. After all these considerations are made, the examiner then can select the most appropriate instrument in light of the purpose for the evaluation. In short, a nonbiased assessment is not prejudicial. Every child should have the same advantages or disadvantages as the next child when being examined. Only then, can an examiner measure a child's present level of functioning and estimate a child's potential level of functioning.

DEFINITION OF GIFTED

Who are the gifted? There are many definitions. The most comprehensive definition that I've seen was developed by the U.S. Office of Education (Executive Summary, 1971, p. 3). It included the top three to five percent of children in five categories: general intellectual ability; specific academic aptitude; creative or productive thinking; leadership ability; and visual and performing arts. However, as a practitioner, I must follow the guidelines outlined in our State Regulations (New Mexico Regulations for Special Education, July, 1975). In New Mexico, gifted is defined as those children who are productive or potentially productive individuals who are superior in intelligence and/or creativity. Superior intelligence is defined as a score of two standard deviations and above on standardized intelligence tests. Superior creativity is determined by standardized tests of creativity, or as verified by two or more experts in the appropriate field. In New Mexico, children can neither be included nor excluded from special education programs based on evaluation criteria without consideration of a child's linguistic and cultural background.

CASE STUDIES

The first case studies that I would like to share with you are those of two English speaking Hispanic gifted children. All the children were tested this school year. I have also helped to identify gifted children from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds during this same period. However, I feel less inhibited about talking about mi gente. Familiarity with one's own kin provides insight that only a member of that family may be knowledgeable of. I feel that I have empathy for and try my best to understand the ways of other people, but I'm sure that I fall short of the mark.

Marcel:

Marcel is a nine-year-old boy. His teacher referred him for testing because he was an excellent student, but primarily because she was impressed by his creativity in writing and in drawing. In fact, Marcel's teacher was keeping a scrapbook of his work in hopes of possibly getting some of them published in a children's magazine. Marcel is the older of two children living with his mother, an aunt, and two cousins. His mother was looking for employment at the time I interviewed her. Marcel's mother graduated from high school and has had jobs as a secretary and receptionist. Spanish and English were spoken within the household, but English was the only language Marcel was reported to understand or speak. Marcel demonstrated superior intelligence but not high enough to be identified as intellectually gifted. Linguistic and social-cultural factors did not appreciably influence the test results. Marcel's achievement seemed to be commensurate with his measured intelligence. Marcel's hearing vocabulary was average. Often, an English speaking gifted Hispanic child displays a relatively poor vocabulary but can use it to express abstract verbal concepts (Gonzales, 1974; Quisenberry, 1974). Marcel's mother is bilingual. Her parents speak primarily Spanish while Marcel speaks only English. I suspect that Marcel's children

will be more fluent in the English language than he is. English speaking Hispanic children may have poor English language skills, not because of inheritantly poor verbal ability, but rather with language models (parents) that have learned to speak English as a second language. This would probably be the case with children from other linguistic backgrounds. On tests of creativity and developmental maturity, Marcel scored within the very superior range and was identified as a creatively gifted child.

Christopher:

Christopher is a seven-year-old boy. He is the middle of three children living with both parents. His parents both have college educations, and Christopher's father works as an electrical engineer. Spanish and English are spoken at home, but - like Marcel - English is the only language that Christopher speaks. Christopher is an avid reader and enjoys caring for animals. Like most children, Christopher likes to play, especially sports. Christopher was referred for testing because he displayed outstanding achievement for a second grader. Like Marcel, social-cultural and linguistic factors were not deemed to influence the test results. Unlike Marcel, Christopher's talents appeared to be intellectual and academic. Christopher scored within the very superior range of intelligence and achievement. He is highly acculturated into the mainstream of American society. No special provisions are needed in the test interpretations.

The next two cases are of predominantly Spanish speaking gifted Hispanic children. To test non-English speaking children, the examiner must be able to test children in their native language or use nonverbal measures.

Claudia:

Claudia is a nine-year-old girl from Mexico. She lives with her mother in a two-family household. Claudia's mother completed seven years of school and works as a domestic in a local hotel. Claudia's mother reported that Claudia

began imitating speech sounds at two months of age and started speaking before she could walk. Claudia first learned to read at four years of age and attended school in Mexico before moving to this country. Claudia has had less than a year's experience in an English speaking school. Claudia's teacher referred Claudia for testing because she has learned to speak and read in English very rapidly. Spanish was the only language spoken by Claudia before enrolling in school in this country. Claudia, like many foreign nationals, was put back a grade upon entering school. However, she was moved back to her proper grade placement once she demonstrated her ability to make rapid progress. All of the tests were given in English. A verbal and nonverbal measure of intelligence was administered. When social-cultural and linguistic factors were taken into consideration, Claudia demonstrated very superior potential and became eligible for gifted services. Based on IQ tests alone, Claudia would not have been identified. Claudia displayed very superior verbal abilities. In less than a year, she had acquired an English language hearing vocabulary within the average range. However, Claudia did appear to have difficulties with the subtleties of the English language. On the arithmetic portion of the achievement test, Claudia's basal was established at the kindergarten level while the ceiling was set at tenth grade. This could be because she did not fully understand the questions. A pattern of scores like this would be hard to explain otherwise. Claudia's nonverbal abilities appeared to be average to high average. She did not score within the gifted range on the Leiter International Performance Scale which is a commonly used test utilized with nonverbal and non-English speaking children. To do well on this test necessitates good visual perceptual abilities. I feel that it has serious limitations. It is in need of revision and restandardization. In respect to the gifted child, the LIPS has a low ceiling, and children past nine years of age may not score within the gifted range. This test

does have its usefulness, and this examiner does utilize it when the situation requires.

Antonio:

Antonio is a nine-year-old boy also recently from Mexico. He has been in this country six months and, like Claudia, has been exposed to the English language for the first time. Like Claudia, he was placed back a grade until he convinced his teacher that he could adjust quickly. One of the indices for screening possibly gifted non-English speaking children is their ability to learn English rapidly (Bernal, 1974). Antonio is the older of two boys living with both his parents. His parents have relatively good educations for Mexican Nationals who immigrate to this country. Antonio's mother completed the eleventh grade while his father finished the eighth grade. Antonio's father works as a laborer for a construction firm, and his mother buses tables in a local restaurant. Both Antonio and his parents have high aspirations. Antonio's mother reported that Antonio like to read, paint, and write his own stories.

Antonio was given a Spanish translation of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Revised (WISC-R). He scored within the superior range of intellectual functioning. When his background was taken into consideration, Antonio demonstrated very superior potential and was determined to be eligible for gifted services. In less than a year, Antonio had acquired an English hearing vocabulary and was achieving at or near the average English speaking child his age. The Spanish translation of the WISC-R was recently developed by Dr. Eloy Gonzales from the University of New Mexico. Psychological Corporation may employ its use similar to the Puerto Rican version of the WISC. Giving tests to children in their native language has the advantage that these children are more comfortable and fluent in their expression, and it diminishes the chances that they will misunderstand directions

and questions. Test translations are still culturally biased due to their content. There are also technical problems, especially in respect to vocabulary. Translations should also be standardized on the appropriate linguistic populations (SOMPA technical manual). Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Spanish speaking New Mexicans, all share the same language, but there are distinct linguistic differences which would require separate translations for each cultural group.

CONCLUSIONS

I advocate the use of the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA). I employ it routinely with all age appropriate children. White children can be as culturally different as Hispanic and black children. I rarely utilize SOMPA in its entirety, but I always use the social-cultural scales. By doing so, I can assess a child's estimated level of potential while gauging his school functioning level. There is a great deal of controversy about SOMPA, but I am in agreement with its philosophy (SOMPA: A Symposium, School Psychology Digest, Winter 1979). I feel that all people are inherently equal in regards to intelligence. I believe that a child's background must be taken into consideration before making important educational decisions that may have a great impact on a child's future. As a practitioner, I have petty criticisms that could be listed as suggestions as to how to improve SOMPA. I do feel that SOMPA puts too much emphasis on cultural factors. Only 15% of the variance in ELP scores have been shown to be due to cultural differences. I do feel that people do tend to have more in common than they have differences. Ironically, as a practitioner, you may have to view a child differently in order to be nonbiased. However, I agree that social factors such as family size, family structure, economic status, and urban acculturation have more to to with differences in a child's test performance. SOMPA has shown that when these social variables are held

constant, children from white, Hispanic, and black backgrounds appear to be essentially a homogeneous population. Intuitively, I feel that the same can be said for other ethnic groups. There are ethnic groups such as children of immigrants and refugees and Navajo children in boarding schools where linguistic and cultural factors play a great part in their differences in test performance. Pluralistic norms based on social variables without regard to ethnicity would serve the needs for most children. The norms could also be extended through high school. Children of immigrants and the like should be treated differently with separate norms. Another reason for advocating one set of pluralistic norms for most children is because SOMPA deals with children from diverse ethnic groups differently even if they have common social traits. For example, a Hispanic child living with relatives would not get additional points because the extended family is a common characteristic among Hispanic people, whereas a white child under similar circumstances would get added points because adoption or foster home placement is more common among white people when the nuclear family structure is dissolved. This may be construed as flattering towards Hispanics. However, both children are without the nurturing of their biological parents. Devising pluralistic norms for each cultural group in this country would be a tremendous undertaking. It also implies that the various cultural groups are homogeneous populations, which I doubt. Mexican-Americans in Ohio are different than Mexican-Americans in the Southwest. Despite my criticism of SOMPA, I support its philosophy and will continue to employ it as a practitioner. I will also encourage other practitioners to do likewise. I will utilize whatever methods necessary to insure the nondiscriminatory assessment of children. The Abbreviated Binet for Disadvantaged Black Children devised by Catherine Bruch (1971) and the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Torrance, 1977) are two instruments that have demonstrated their usefulness

in identifying culturally different gifted children. I do have misgivings about quota systems (LeRose, 1978) or other less formal means of identifying the culturally different gifted children. Not that formalized tests are without faults, but objective criteria are needed to identify children in a nondiscriminatory fashion. What pleases me the most as a practitioner in identifying the culturally different gifted child who would go unrecognized under traditional methods is that the seed has been planted. It's up to us as educators to nurture what we have sown. In closing, I would like to read a poem composed by nine-year-old Marcel who shows creative promise.

Fight

Me and my
friend we got
in a fight and
now he's always
out of site, we
got in a fight
the day before
last and now I
know its all in
the past, but
me and he
were best friends
and I never thought
it would come to
and end, but it did
and that is that
and now all I have
to play with is my
old pet cat.

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